

**FRANK
BIRD
LINDERMAN**



Helena/ Lewis & Clark County Historic Preservation Commission
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TEXT PROVIDED BY STEFANIE FLYNN

Frank Bird Linderman

Frank Bird Linderman was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 25, 1869, the son of James Bird Linderman and Mary Ann Brannan Linderman. He attended schools in Ohio and Chicago, including Oberlin College, before moving to Montana Territory in 1885 at the age of sixteen. He worked as a trapper from 1885 to 1891, then met his wife, Minnie Jane Johns, in Demersville, Montana, in 1891. They were married in 1893 in Missoula, Montana. They had three children: Wilda, Verne, and Norma.

From 1893 to 1897, he worked in Butte, Montana, as an assayer, then moved to Brandon, Montana. About 1900, the family moved to Sheridan, Montana, where he was an assayer, furniture salesman, and newspaperman.

Linderman was also a politician: he served in the Montana state legislature in the 1903 and 1905 sessions. He ran for the U.S. Congress in 1916 and 1918; in 1924 he ran for the U.S. Senate against Thomas J. Walsh. He was a Mason, and was inducted to that brotherhood in Sheridan in 1899. He received the Scottish Rite in the Helena consistory in 1911. He continued to be active in Masonry and held a number of offices in that organization.

From 1905 to 1907, he was Montana's Assistant Secretary of State. After that, he became a successful insurance agent with the Guardian Insurance Company of America. In 1917, he bought property at Goose Bay (With the proceeds from his books sales, *Indian Why Stories*!) on Flathead Lake, moved the family from Helena, and pursued writing full-time. He also took up sculpting in bronze.

Linderman had wanted to be a writer as early as 1911, when he had been encouraged by Opie Read. Read encouraged him to submit his first collection of tales to Charles Scribner's Sons, who published it as *Indian Why Stories* in 1915. He continued to publish to favorable reviews, but found the profession less than remunerative. In 1924, with his writing income still small, he bought the Hotel Kalispell and ran it for two years, then sold it as a profit. He changed publishers in 1929, and worked with Hermann Hagedorn of the John Day Company. Charlie Russell, a lifelong and close friend, illustrated many of his books.



He devoted a great deal of his life to Montana's Native Americans, learning and writing about their ways and trying to help them in material ways. His first contacts with them were as a trapper, when he became acquainted with members of the Flathead and Kootenai tribes; he later knew many Crow, Blackfeet, Cree, and Chippewas. Many Indians taught him tribal legends, including Kootenai Two-Comes-Over-the-Hill; Muskegon, a Cree; and Full-Of-Dew, a Chippewa medicine man. He was instrumental in founding the Rocky Boy's Reservation for Montana's Cree and Chippewa. He was adopted into three tribes: the Blackfeet, the Cree, and the Crow.

Linderman's published books include *Indian Why Stories: Sparks from War Eagle's Lodge-Fire* (1915); *Indian Lodge-Fire Stories* (1918); *On a Passing Frontier: Sketches from the Northwest* (1920); *Indian Old-Man Stories: More Sparks from War Eagle's Lodge-Fire* (1920); *How It Came About Stories* (1921); *Bunch-Grass and Blue Joint* (1921); *Lige Mounts, Free Trapper* (1922); *Kootenai Why Stories* (1926); *American: The Life Story of a Great Indian, Plenty-Coups, Chief of the Crows* (1930); *Old-Man Coyote* (1931); *Red Mother* (1932); *Beyond Law* (1933); *Stumpy* (1933); and "Out of the North" in *Blackfeet Indians*, by Winold Reiss (1935). He also published numerous magazine articles, tales, anecdotes, and poems.

Linderman's health was fragile after he tried to save his Goose Bay home from a fire in 1919, and it began to fail in 1930. He died in Santa Barbara, California, in 1938. Minnie Linderman died in 1941.

From the Northwestern Digital Archives Collection.

524 West Lawrence:

Frank Bird Linderman lived here from 1907 to 1917, and wrote his first book in this house, "Indian Why Stories". Linderman's friend, the artist Charlie Russell, provided the illustrations. The work was popular, selling well on the east coast.

Stories we've heard about Frank include Indians camping out in the park behind us, with their horses and tepees, really pushing him hard to get the Rocky Boy Reservation set up, because he finally had influence as Assistant Secretary of State. The Indian people were starving, homeless and scattered across Montana. Hunting and farming were thus denied them and they were forced to live in squalid camps, eating food scrounged from garbage dumps. Linderman demanded the legislature take action on the Reservation issue, threatening to have Scribner and Sons print photos that Frank had taken of the living conditions the Chippewa Cree.



The photos here were taken in our back yard, circa 1913 to 1915. Frank and Charlie were pictured next to the tepee poles of Frank's Blackfeet painted lodge given to him by the Blackfeet tribe.

The one of Charlie and his wife Nancy was taken by the birch tree that still stands just inside the gate near our front door.

There is also one of Verne on our front steps, who was Frank and Minnie's daughter.

We do not know how this man, Will Miller, was associated with the Lindermans. This is the only historic photo we've found showing the front of the house. Circa 1913.





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